

Abney and Associates Internet Technology: Why we remain disconnected even though we now connect more

The ubiquitous use of Internet everywhere except for the remotest corners of our globe today requires a technology that is unprecedented in the history of the human race. Satellites that transmit signals through a worldwide wireless communication infrastructure now surround our planet even more since Marconi (or should we say Tesla) invented the radio.

Whereas the Internet used to be the sole domain of US government spies and other agents working in foreign lands; it now serves as the basic tool for [communication](#) for many individuals and most, if not all, commercial and industrial concerns. And to think that only a few decades ago, the beeper and the fax machine reigned supreme as the quickest way to transmit data and short messages. Today, people can send sms, photos and videos in a few seconds just by using a smartphone or a PC.

We ask ourselves this question: How are we different from the people who lived before the Industrial Revolution in terms of social cohesion? Are we much more [“in touch”](#) with others because of social networking or are we merely communicating more but not really getting closer as we should? Let us look at some tell-tale signs of our continuing modern social alienation.

1. We continue to be a planet of alienated people

Most people who use Facebook have at least 50 or 100 friends with whom they share a big part of their wakeful life – from what they eat for lunch to what they wear at a party and to where they spent the last weekend. Ironically, however, those posts are not entirely for all your friends but for those who are closely tied to the people in the photo or the video posted.

Only a few people use Facebook as a forum for dispensing vital information to as wide an audience as possible. And these people are either members of an advocacy or have a group that serves special social or economic needs. That is, while Facebook and other social networks are potent tools for promoting or advertising products and services, real social networking in the sense of getting in touch with people as they are and where they are is not largely being addressed.

In general, most people use these services to remove their sense of alienation, insecurity or loneliness in a still largely-divided and disparate world. Social networking has provided a means to spread knowledge but not a genuine merging of sentiments and beliefs. China and other communists countries and many Islamic nations control the Internet to prevent the flow of corruptive and immoral western influences, and rightly so. But most democratic countries have no such similar fear or care for their people as they allow almost anything to be seen and heard online.

2. In reality, we still remain choosy as to who we communicate with

Given the choice or if only Facebook administrators were more protective of individual privacy, we would all limit access to our activities to just a few people. But the way the system works, everyone gets to see what you post online. It is a ripe place for spies and criminals to look for hapless victims.

Sure, we all want to have exchange of the latest news with our close friends and relatives; but as it is, the whole world can find out as much the same things your son or daughter knows about your recent activities. But as we have no choice as to how we can control the flow of information, we just let it pass, hoping people will not care anyway about what we do in the same way that we will not care about what they will do. Any amazing or tragic events will merely catch our attention now and then as if we were only reading the news. What is important is we know how our immediate circle of relatives and friends are doing.

3. With the alienation and parochialism preserved, we still fail to reach out

Sure, when calamities or tragedies happen, the Internet allows us to come to the aid of those in need in a more rapid though indirect manner; but sadly it is limited to merely expressing platitudes and, at best, sincere kind words and providing financial aid. There are people, of course, who go beyond the virtual connection and come to the aid of victims in a very personal way; but that remains a minority. Social networking may help spread the word as to the extent of the disaster and the necessary medium for coordinating relief efforts; but in the end, the real help needed by people in need does not come from people who sit before a PC or with a smartphone in hand but from people who carry no gadgets but food, clothing, shelter and medicine and from tireless people who can offer a helping hand or a listening ear to those who are hurting.

Victims of Yolanda had no electricity nor cellphones to use after they were hit by the super-typhoon. They needed food and shelter which did not come until after several weeks. The first photos of the disaster, however, were online in a matter of days. People watched online as people suffered and many, to be fair, did help to alleviate the suffering.

The technology may have allowed us to all suffer together, whether in truth or vicariously; but we have merely magnified the degree of suffering without the corresponding amount of compassion and commiseration to flow toward those who need it. That is, like the news that bears bad report, we have helped to spread tragic things without providing the real consolation we must provide for those who suffer the tragedy. Many of us also suffer as we see the suffering from a distance without doing anything about it and whether that is good for a society or not is something we can ponder upon for a long time.

4. Internet Technology still has to provide a real beneficial service other than to inform or to entertain

In general, social networking and online activities are for the purpose of information and providing recreation. The amount of time people spend in gaming and even merely chatting into the wee hours of the morning provide no saving grace for the misuse or abuse of the technology. Young people waste a lot of time playing inane games and doing nothing but gossiping and yapping (as they used to do with the old land-phones). As far as using the technology to transform lives and to provide a venue for real social change, we do not see any of that happening except for a few groups that are into advocacies or activities that had already been in place even before the Internet came.

Internet technology only quickens the speed at which information is passed on or received; but it has not improved the ability of people to respond to meaningful and fruitful endeavors. What they do in schools, churches and offices they can continue to do after the bell rings or the clock strikes five, leaving people less time to be with themselves in solitude to think or meditate. We are connected, yes; but we remain as disconnected as ever.

So, if Internet technology has failed to make us more socially receptive and responsive, what can we do to make it more beneficial? We need to go back to the old way of talking face-to-face and touching one another in a loving and sincere way. Turning off the phone and the PC may be the best way we can do to recover and maintain the real process for communicating our needs and our joys with one another. And that is, by opening our hearts and minds to people without the barriers we have set up before and between ourselves. Using technology to accomplish that is still the real challenge we have today.